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UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
FEDERAL EXTENSION SERVICE
Washington 25, D. C.

THE ROLE OF THE EXTENSION SERVICE IN
PUBLIC AFFAIRS EDUCATION

The complex interdependence of the different segments of our economic system makes it imperative that those engaged in agriculture maintain a constant awareness of the overall movements in the total economy.

Many issues in the nature of public affairs, most of which are local or have direct local implications, arise from these relationships. Extension is called upon for assistance in analyzing them and in providing facts about related programs.

Extension programs grow out of the expressed wants and carefully analyzed needs of local people. Educational work in public affairs becomes an inseparable part of these programs as they are developed by local people and as the Extension Service attempts to help people meet these needs.

Extension work in public affairs is based upon the assumption that:

1. The durability of representative government depends on an informed citizenry. Education involves providing information based on fact. People given facts and methods for their analysis will make intelligent decisions.
2. That there is general recognition that the understanding of issues has important impacts upon the ability of rural people to manage their resources to the benefit of themselves and the Nation.
3. That rural people as citizens are concerned about public issues and are seeking understanding as to their effects and implications upon their welfare.
4. That land-grant colleges (through the Extension Service) as public educational institutions, have an important obligation in this area and a responsibility to help people understand issues affecting them.
5. That it is the function of Extension education to provide basic background information and in so doing to point out why certain economic problems have arisen, and what alternative solutions may be. Extension takes no position in determining what policies should be adopted.

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6. That it is the function of people through their own organizations to arrive at their own answers and solutions, and build policies to bring about these solutions. Extension has an obligation to provide the facts and the analysis of information which organized groups can use in making their own decisions.
7. That Extension recognizes the importance of and need for strong organizations and should in all appropriate ways lend assistance and encouragement to them as they develop their own programs for the consideration of public affairs.
8. That implementation of decisions by organizations as they counsel and advise with bodies politic is the responsibility of organized groups of citizens -- not that of a public educational institution.
9. That the function of the Federal Extension Service in public affairs education is merely that of helping with the counseling and training of staff members in the State and county extension services in the most effective teaching methods.

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Dissemination of Information on Public Affair Policy Issues

We wish to go on record as opposing a recently inaugurated extension program on public affairs policy issues within the Federal Extension Service. We have no quarrel with the intent of those presently engaged in this work, but we are concerned about the latent risk involved in having Federally-employed persons engaged in this kind of endeavor. Leadership in this broad area of public policy appraisal must continue in the hands of farm organizations, farm magazines, newspapers, radio, television and other privately-controlled means of getting information on controversial public policies to our farm people.

*National Grange Annual Meeting, Rochester, New York, 1956; action taken by Committee on Agriculture

